

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0926**

January 30, 2019

Colonel Andrew Kelly  
District Commander, Jacksonville  
US Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District  
Jacksonville, FL

Dear Col. Kelly:

Thank you for beginning the process of updating the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS) review as instructed by Section 1106 of P.L. 115-270. It is my understanding that you and your staff are planning National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping meetings in anticipation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the LORS review in Miami, West Palm Beach, Clewiston, Okeechobee, Ft. Myers, Broward County, and Stuart. I respectfully request the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) add a meeting in the City of Marathon this February or March.

The NEPA scoping process aims to consider the impact of federal agency action to the human environment. The operations of Lake Okeechobee have a direct effect on the human environment for stakeholders in the Florida Keys. Residents of the Florida Keys directly rely on the management of Lake Okeechobee for dry and wet season flows to Florida Bay. Without sufficient dry and wet season flows to Florida Bay, environmental harm occurs. Environmental harm to Florida Bay leads to adverse impacts to the human environment for residents of the Florida Keys. Therefore, it is proper that the residents of the Florida Keys are given a convenient opportunity to express how the management and operations of Lake Okeechobee impacts their community.

My constituents depend on wet season and dry season flows from Lake Okeechobee to the greater Everglades and Florida Bay for the health of the natural system. These dry and wet season flows directly impact my constituent's drinking water supply, the minimization of saltwater intrusion, recreation, and enhancement of fish and wildlife. Many in the fishing and tourism business from Key Largo to Key West directly depend on dry and wet season flows from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay for the environmental and economic health of their communities.

Operational rules and priorities in LORS and south of Lake Okeechobee directly impact the environmental conditions in Florida Bay. In 2015, operational decisions to reduce freshwater flows into Florida Bay below scientifically determined minimum flow levels (MFLs) led to hyper-salinity and catastrophic environmental harm in Florida Bay. As a result, Florida Bay experienced over 40,000 acre of seagrass die-off, algal blooms, poor water quality, high turbidity and the degradation of fish and wildlife.

Many of my constituents in the Florida Keys directly depend on the health of Florida Bay, a historically world class fishery, for their livelihoods. The seagrass and health of the ecosystem has still not recovered, and may not for years. The damage caused by operational decisions made in 2015 continue to harm my constituents and Everglades National Park.

It is of the highest importance that my constituents in the Florida Keys be given a voice in the LORS review NEPA scoping process in a location convenient for them. I am sure you would agree that holding a NEPA scoping meeting in the Florida Keys is a reasonable request that better achieves the intent of the NEPA scoping process by providing an opportunity for the USACE to hear from residents whom this federal agency action impacts. As such, I would appreciate you holding a Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule revisit NEPA scoping meeting in the City of Marathon this February or March.

With NEPA scoping meetings beginning in February, I would appreciate your prompt response to my request.

Respectfully,



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
Member of Congress